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ABSTRACT

Cooperation among Scandinavian nations (Norway, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden) is important in order to develop an effective policy regarding the education of immigrants and refugees. Each of the Scandinavian countries has a definitive education policy for refugees and immigrants. However, cooperative efforts among the nations through the Nordic Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Nordic Council, and the Helsinki Agreement set no firm policy on refugee and immigrant education. Significant issues for policy makers to evaluate and consider in studying refugee and immigrant education include minority language, culture, and group development. Minority populations in Scandinavia, as in all of Europe, are expected to increase, creating a greater need for minority education at all levels that will benefit the whole of society. (AS)

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Kristi Planck Johnson

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"The Nordic Council and Immigrant Education Policy"

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Introduction

In 1907 the Nordic Inter-Parliamentary Union (NIPU), made up of members of parliament from Norway, Sweden and Denmark, first met to discuss common issues of interest to Scandinavians. Following World War I, Finland and Iceland joined. Originally the NIPU met annually but beginning in 1947 they started to meet every other year and their final meeting was held in 1957. After the Second World War there were political, economic and defense motivations for the five Scandinavian countries to unite their efforts. A defense alliance was formed but short lived. Economic alliances were also a part of the post-war attempts to unite the Scandinavian countries.

In 1953 as an outgrowth of the NIPU, the inaugural session of the Nordic Council was opened by King Frederick of Denmark. Hans Hedtoft was the Danish Prime Minister and an active supporter of the new venture. Norway,

Sweden, Denmark and Iceland were original members. Finland joined in 1955 when the Russians withdrew their objections and made it clear that Finland would be "no party to any discussion of defense policy or to the adoption of a united standpoint towards any conflict of interest among the great powers." (Derry, 1979, p. 375) Delegates to the Nordic Council are chosed by their respective parliaments and are representative of the main political parties. The delegates are seated alphabetically rather than by country so that Scandinavian interest will be encouraged instead of national or party affliation. The Nordic Council is more formal than the NIPU and the Council considers more issues than the NIPU. In addition, the Council considers more issues than the NIPU. In addition, the Council has created a permanent bureaucracy. The Nordic Council meets annually for a week-long session and is attended by the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and other ministers. However, only the official delegates have voting power.

Helsinki Agreement

Ten years after the Nordic Council was established a new document was signed which gave significant parameters to the design of the Nordic Council. This document known as the Helsinki Agreement was signed in 1962 and is of special interest to a study of refugees and immigrants in the 1980's

and 1990's. A treaty of cooperation between the five Scandinavian countries, the Helsinki Agreement opens with the statement of purpose:

> .....desirous of furthering the close connections between the Nordic nations in culture and in juridical and social conceptions and of developing cooperation between the Nordic countries;
>
> Endeavoring to create uniform rules in the Nordic countries in as many respects as possible;
>
> .....desirous of continuing the cooperation, important to these countries, in the Nordic Council and other agencies of cooperation; (Anderson, 1967, p. 174)

The statement of purpose is followed by forty articles some of which specifically relate to matters which are of interest to refugee and immigrant affairs. Article 35 is especially significant as it refers to the need to consult one another and to coordinate matters of mutual importance. The theoretical commitment of joint endeavors leads to few examples of cooperation or policy statements which improve conditions regarding the refugees and immigrants.

The lack of Nordic Council policy direction does not imply that the individual countries are also lacking in their official policy concern for refugees and immigrants. Nor does it indicate that there is lack of educational policy statements from other organizations to which individual countries belong. Each of the Nordic countries has a definitive educational policy and active program designed for refugees and immigrants. Each country has

also established legislation relating to recognizing refugees, determining their status and offering asylum. Each country has dealt with the spontaneous refugees which arrive at various ports unannounced to official sources but obviously announced to the network of ethnic groups. In addition, the United Nations takes an active role of international leadership through the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees(UNHCR), Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Disembarkation Resettlement Offers (DISERO) and Rescue at Sea Resettlement Offers (RASRO). Further, the International Organization for Migration(IOM) is an international organization which plans and carries out the transfer of refugees to countries where resettlement is offered. The Council of Europe, the European Economic Community and the Organization for Economic and Co-coperative Development (OECD) also support policy regarding refugee and immigrant populations.

Cultural Cooperation

As an additional step towards cooperation beyond the Helsinki Agreement, countries agreed to a statement concerning cultural cooperation signed in 1971. Joint decisions regarding educational objectives and structure for the education of refugees and immigrants within the Nordic countries fall under this agreement. Cooperation

is based on an exchange of teaching materials only. According to a staff person from the Nordic Cultural Cooperation Committee, "the problems are specific to each Nordic country.....cooperation on a broad level is difficult." (Correspondence from Mari Hareide, 1989) The Nordic Council serves only as an advisory body. There is a Nordic School Cooperation Committee but this committee consists of high level people from the Ministries of Education in each of the countries and there is no direct involvement of immigrant education within their structure.

Rationale

Given the highly organized system of Nordic Cooperation is it possible for the Nordic Council to iniatiate effective policy regarding the education of immigrant and refugee students living in Scandinavia? A recent case study research project revealed that basic to any discussion of policy making and minority education is the fact that despite cultural differences, many Western countries have inherited from the 18th and 19th centuries a general widespread commitment to unilingual schooling organized on a territorial basis. This phenomena is

often intimately bound up with the development of the modern state and national feeling. (Churchill, 1986, pp. 116-117)

In general, policy goals involve providing the minorities with:

> .....improved opportunities of reaching the same educational outcomes and objectives as are attained by members of the majority. In a few jurisdictions, the goal is taken to mean helping the minority to achieve outcomes and objectives defined by the minorities in terms of their own aspirations and culture. (Churchill, 1986, p. 124)

Rationale in the form of schooling and language, schooling and culture and schooling and group development are crucial to any study of refugee and immigrant education policy.

First of all, schooling and language - bilingualism as the cause of learning handicaps is a subject which is of importance to policymakers. "The converse of considering the minority language a handicap is the equating of majority language knowledge with educational success." (Churchill, 1986, p. 128) Oral ability and majority language acquisition are also considered as areas which need consideration by policymakers in order to fully understand the needs of the minority. The transition from mother tongue to the majority language is a significant factor and a valid issue in rationale building for policymakers.

Secondly, schooling and culture. In addition to specific linguistic factors, cultural issues also need

evaluation and consideration. The following questions would aid in the process of policy analysis:

---How should culturally negative elements in the curriculum be eliminated?

---Should pupils from the same or similar cultures be grouped together?

---How can the educational staff be sensitized to minority cultural characteristics?

---How may culturally relevant information be provided for use in the classroom?

---How may curriculum changes be made to reflect multicultural policy?

---How may staff of the same culture as the pupils be hired?

---How should a minority language be recognized -- as a language of instruction or as a topic of instruction?

And, finally, schooling and group development. While the recognition of language and culture of the minority are significant and necessary factors, the relationship of the minority in long term societal network is of ultimate concern. Participation in governance, participation and visibility as teachers and volunteers, administrative staff, concern for pupil grouping and separation from majority pupils -- all of these are salient points for policy decisions. External and internal factors are integrated within the family, school and community and they all affect the immigrant child.

Future Direction and Cooperation

While there has not been extensive cooperation between the Nordic Council and refugee and immigrant education,

there has been at least acknowledgement of the issue and an interest in expanding and increasing knowledge about the minority population in Scandinavia. At the request of the Nordic Council, the Danish Refugee Council was given the task of investigating the individual Nordic countries and their refugee and immigrant policy. With cooperation from the UNHCR, a questionnaire was circulated in 1987. Already familiar with Denmark, the project leaders traveled to Helsinki, Oslo and Norrköping, to gather additional information. Iceland's reply was given by the Red Cross as their immigrant population is rather small compared to the other Nordic countries. The final report indicated no recommendations or direction. ("Nordic Refugee and Immigration Policy," 1987) However, there is curiosity about the situation in Scandinavia beyond this study and in the future. With certainty, there will be an increasingly larger minority population throughout Europe including Scandinavia. There will be a need for life-long learning as persons of all ages will be at various levels of their education when they arrive. Because of interruption in their education for many of the refugees, education available at all levels, is a benefit to society in general.

What about the future for cooperative international efforts in education for immigrant pupils? Education

policy addressed as a vital component for development of minority relations will be a key factor toward any progress to ensure successful treatment of Scandinavia's minority population. It is not an issue which will take care of itself. Rather, education policy in Scandinavia written to benefit all members of society - minority and majority - and considered first as a local, then as a Nordic and finally as an interlational, global policy needs to be a part of a conscious effort aimed at offering linguistic skills and cultural respect. Emphasis placed on the development of minority participation in the process of decision making as well as need for staff training and the encouragment of public understanding of minority matters will be of primal concern. There is still much work which needs to be accomplished to bring about practical solutions toward building bridges to minority education policy in Scandinavia and elsewhere.

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